



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 19, 2008

The Honorable David Price, Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
B-307 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harold Rogers, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
1116 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Price and Ranking Member Rogers:

As you begin work on the fiscal year 2009 Homeland Security Appropriations bill, we strongly urge you to provide increased funding for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) and Assistance to Firefighters Grant Programs. As you know, although these two programs are each authorized at approximately \$1 billion per year, the President's fiscal year 2009 budget requests only \$300 million for the Fire Grant Program while once again zeroing out the SAFER program.

The SAFER program, authorized in 2003, provides much-needed funding for career and volunteer fire departments across America to hire new firefighters and recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. This program is critical to the thousands of fire stations across the country that are currently operating short of staff.

When adequately funded SAFER will bring our nation's fire departments to staffing levels that will improve the safety of our firefighters, and the communities they serve, as they respond to the scene of a fire, auto accident, or other natural or manmade disaster. Two-thirds of all career and volunteer fire departments in our nation, located in both large cities and small towns, do not have sufficient personnel to adequately protect the public.

Under the SAFER program, fire departments throughout the country are able to apply for federal grants to hire and pay new firefighters for five years. The federal grant decreases annually on a sliding scale in order to promote complete local self-sufficiency after four years. In addition, grants have been awarded to state and local organizations to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. Through your leadership, SAFER was funded at an historic level of \$190 million in FY08. We thank you for your support and urge you to work to build upon this success.

As you know, the SAFER program complements the very successful Assistance to Firefighters Grant program, through which the federal government provides funds for training and equipment to fire stations throughout the country. Ensuring that career and volunteer departments have adequate numbers of firefighters will allow departments to fully utilize the training and equipment money provided through the Fire Grant program.

We certainly appreciate your efforts last year to increase funding for the Fire Grant Program to \$560 million, a marked improvement over recent years, but unfortunately still short of the \$750 million the program received in fiscal years 2003 and 2004. The early level of funding demonstrated Congress' strong bipartisan support for the Fire Grant program, as well as its understanding of the contributions this program has made to our firefighters and the communities they serve.


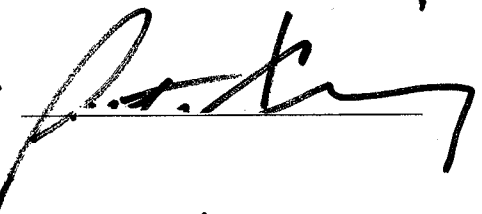


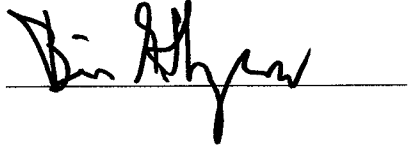
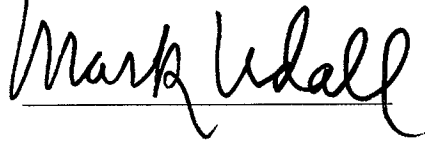
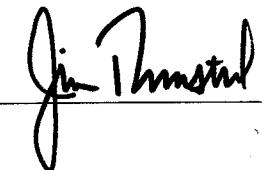


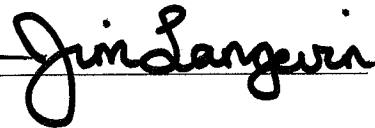
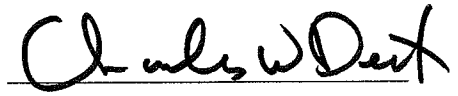
This program has positively impacted public safety by providing more than \$4.2 billion since 2001 for infrared cameras, personal protective gear, hazmat detection devices, improved breathing apparatuses, advanced training and fitness programs, fire engines, prevention and education programs, and interoperable communication systems. This is the basic equipment our fire departments need to effectively respond to all hazards. And yet, the more than \$3 billion in applications submitted for the current program year demonstrate that there is much work to be done before all of our communities are served by first responders who are equipped and trained as well as possible.

We ask far too many of our firefighters to risk their lives in our defense every day, too often with insufficient staffing, inadequate training and obsolete equipment, and we have an obligation to provide them the necessary resources to perform their jobs as safely and effectively as possible.

We urge you to help Congress meet that obligation by providing increased funding the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) Program in the fiscal year 2009 Homeland Security Appropriations bill.

We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Kirsten E. Dillard ~~Dillard~~ Shelley Gephley

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